

February 22, 2023

Written testimony submitted to the Connecticut General Assembly H.B. 6659- "An act concerning the state budget for the biennium ending June 30, 2025

Hello distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, Chairs Osten and Walker, Vice Chairs Exum and Hartley and Ranking Members Berthel and Nuccio:

My name is Sara Batchelder. I live in Simsbury. I am a member of the First Church of Christ, and a proud member of the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance, or GHIAA. GHIAA is a network of over 50 diverse congregations across the theological spectrum working together for justice.

I am writing in support of a 20 million dollar allocation over two years to community violence reduction efforts across the state. Although this amount was not specifically in the Governor's budget, it is necessary and will save many lives.

Connecticut is widely known as the scene of the most tragic mass shooting in modern times, which has motivated me and many others to lobby against the use of automatic weapons. However, the gun violence in our cities is of a different nature. It involves young people killing each other with hand guns and other innocent people getting killed in the crossfire!

We need to find ways to limit the number of handguns available to be used for these purposes. But we also need to help our citizens find ways to resolve their differences without using violent means. Community violence interruption programs in Hartford are associated with a 37% reduction in gun injuries.

One such program, Hartford Communities That Care, has served over 2200 victims of violence and their families, by providing prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery support services. We need to adequately fund programs like this one that address the underlying causes of gun violence by focusing on the youth who are most at risk for becoming involved in gun violence.

I worked in the mental health field in Hartford for many years and have counseled many grieving mothers who have lost their children to senseless gun violence. One young man, a college student, was killed in a drive by shooting while sitting on his porch talking with friends. Another high school student was shot and killed while walking home from a basketball game. A young woman was killed by a stray bullet while driving home from an evening out with friends. As a mother myself, these stories broke my heart. I believe the children of Hartford and every city deserve to live in a safe environment as my children did. However funding for gun violence intervention and prevention in Connecticut is not currently adequate to sustain these organizations in their efforts to end gun violence in our state.

In 2022, 39 people were killed and 136 wounded by gun violence in Hartford, according the Hartford Courant. This violence takes the lives of people who could have led productive lives and contributed to their communities. The frequent shootings create a sense of fear and trauma in the community. We need to recognize gun violence as a preventable public health crisis. We need to expand access to high quality, culturally competent social and mental health supports and address the impact of trauma. We need to support agencies who offer young people attractive alternatives to criminal behavior and support healthy norms about masculinity (statistics show that the vast majority of violent crimes are committed by young males). Agencies need to be able to hire and pay adequately outreach workers who can help troubled youth find productive ways to function and be accepted in society.

I ask you to please provide funding so we can continue to provide services to people who are at risk and create a feeling of safety in our communities.

Thank you for your attention,

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